

CGIAR Chairman's Farewell Comments MTM2000, May 27, Dresden

Introduction:

Colleagues and friends.

"Parting is such sweet sorrow", as Shakespeare reminded us.

I must confess to a certain sense of anticipation as I go out to meet my future. These are encouraging times for those of us who believe that the yesterdays of the human story can inspire great tomorrows. They are challenging times, for all of us who are committed to building new lives for the "wretched of the earth," using science and technology as the instruments of change. They are exhilarating times, in the world of science. I see all these elements coming together in a life of inquiry and creativity ahead.

And yet, how can I not feel the burden of sorrow, knowing that when I bring down the gavel today, I will be ending my formal relationship with you -- my friends, colleagues, and collaborators. I consider it a special privilege to have worked for the CGIAR during the past six-and-a-half years. I thank you for sharing the hopes and aspirations, the joys and sorrows, of my tenure. What is most important is that together we tried -- even if we did not always succeed. And in trying together....what a journey it has been, from Delhi to Dresden.

My predecessors assured me that of all the positions they held at the Bank, none was more satisfying than the association with the CGIAR. Despite the great diversity of their experience at the Bank and outside it, they felt most attached to CGIAR chairmanship. Those are my sentiments as well.

The six chairmen who preceded me brought an outstanding blend of passion and compassion to their tasks: Dick Demuth, Warren Baum, Shahid Husain, David Hopper, Wilfried Thalwitz and V. Rajagopalan. I was proud to follow the path they trod. As I said to you in New Delhi, I very much wished to live up to their high standards. I hope I did.

Appreciation:

I have been helped in my chairmanship by many of you. They are numerous and you will miss your flights if I try to name them all. Suffice it to say that my knowledge has been enriched and my attitudes shaped by colleagues and friends along the whole continuum of the CGIAR -- from the sage wisdom of M. S. Swaminathan to the infectious enthusiasm of Fernando Chaparro. From the solid professionalism of Alex McCalla to the humane caring of Ruth Haug. From the subtle wit of Andrew Bennett to the wry humor of Jochen de Haas, the commitment of Paul Egger, the wisdom of Klaus Winkel, the thoughtful voice of experience expressed by Raj Paroda, the exuberance of Teresa Fogelberg, the

sound judgment of Johan Holmberg, the unremitting loyalty to the CGIAR of Ian MacGillivray, the brilliance of Henri Carsalade, the fervor of Cyrus Ndiritu, and the initiative of Sally Shelton who led the return of the US, and so many, many more. But here I am slipping again, and taking the risk of keeping you here for a long, long time...Let me not do that. Let me only say, thank you, one and all.

I say a special "thank you" to my teachers who brought me to agriculture and have consistently added to my understanding over the years. There were:

Formal teachers during my academic studies,

Collegial teachers -- my colleagues and nominal subordinates, but teachers nevertheless, during my professional life,

Real life teachers -- the farmers themselves, who always inspired me by the nobility of their spirit, their knowledge, and their triumphs over adversity.

I offer my heartfelt thanks to the academic who, many years ago, introduced me to agriculture. At the time, he was a young assistant professor at Harvard, by the name of Walter P. Falcon. He has continued to influence my views, and the manner of their expression. You are a friend, and a great help, Wally.

I turn now to CGIAR centers. They have been described as the "jewels in the crown" of the CGIAR System. They are, indeed, very special: centers of scientific excellence, mobilizing science to serve the needs of the poor. Where else but at CGIAR centers does this magnificent combination flourish? Whatever we say and decide at our meetings, it is the centers that transform our words into living reality.

I visited the centers as soon as my duties as Chairman began. Center scientists took the time to explain their work to me, and because of that, I have become a more effective ambassador on their behalf. I was impressed by their pursuit of scientific excellence, and inspired by their devotion to the CGIAR mission. I was exhilarated by the exciting possibilities of their work. They deserve our admiration and our gratitude. I thank all the scientists in the CGIAR constellation. I thank the board chairs and their colleagues for their dedication to maintaining scientific excellence at the centers. They are such a wonderful group of colleagues. I thank the center directors – too often, not heard adequately at this table – who have all become my close friends. They are characterized by a sense of vision, and of unremitting commitment to a noble cause. I respect them all, and will not cease to speak up on their behalf.

I count on you to protect their interests. The *raison d'etre* of this group, surely, is to enable center scientists to function effectively and without corrosive challenges to their morale.

I want to mention three colleagues who were stalwarts of my term.

Alex McCalla was my gift from the CGIAR to the Bank. We actually gained from that act of gift-giving because what it did was to infiltrate "Mr. CGIAR" into the Bank.

Michel Petit moved from the position he held, overseeing the Bank's work on agriculture, to serve as the Bank's "point man" for agricultural research. He did more than most others have done to strengthen the NARS and foster the development of the GFAR. He also brought passion and caring to the work of the Finance Committee in a difficult period of transition.

Alexander von der Osten has been my counselor and companion, from the beginning. Whatever you think I have achieved is the product of his collaboration with me. We were a team. His loyalty to the CGIAR knows no bounds. He works behind the scenes, without fuss or fanfare, attempting much and achieving much for all of you. His determination and ability to nurture increased Southern membership are widely recognized. It is a great loss for the CGIAR that the rules of retirement compel him to leave. Nevertheless, it is fitting that his final MTM as Executive Secretary should be in the land of his birth. Good luck, Alexander, in whatever you decide to undertake post-ICW. Good luck to your charming family as well.

And I would be remiss if I did not mention the CGIAR Secretariat -- Ravi, Selcuk, Manny, and the entire team, those who are here in Dresden, as well as those in Washington. Their contribution to the CGIAR is invaluable. I want especially to thank the retirees such as Ernest (my companion over sleepless nights of work) and the young stalwarts such as Salah Brahimi, who tirelessly support the CGIAR mission. But it is no secret to you that Sarwat Hussain has been my special friend and closest assistant - he initially came from ICRISAT via the US to the Bank, and now back to the CGIAR. Sarwat, hearty thanks from a grateful colleague.

From Renewal to Rebirth:

Colleagues and friends.

The CGIAR faced multiple crises from shortly before I began my term. I will spare you the details. You know them well. To overcome the crises as we did was no mean feat.

The best-known of the problems the CGIAR faced was the serious financial crunch of 1993 and early 1994; a downturn aggravated by incoherent funding arrangements. The funding crisis, however, was like the tip of an iceberg. What lay submerged beneath the surface of immediate attention could have turned out to be far more life threatening.

We toiled together to surmount the problems. The 18-month program of renewal that was inaugurated in New Delhi in May 1994 redesigned the vision of the CGIAR, refocused its research agenda, strengthened some of its governance mechanisms, and stabilized its finances. From the shaky \$220 million of 1993 to the \$340 million of today is a great leap forward. The crumbling confidence of center scientists was shored up. I cherish that experience, and honor all those whose combined effort produced demonstrable results.

In my judgment, however, the single most significant long-term effect of the 1994/95 renewal is the growth of a sense of "open-ness." Nothing manifests that new spirit better than the transformation in the dynamic of CGIAR membership. This Group is today a fully South-North enterprise. Twenty-two "country members" of the CGIAR are from the South, and twenty-one from the North. There were none from the South in 1971; and only seven in early 1995, before the Lucerne meeting.

Now if only we could do as well in terms of gender diversity... we will all gain. That is a parting charge from me to all of you.

I do not mean to dismiss or denigrate the role major investors played in creating the CGIAR, and will continue to play in the future. However, the broadening of CGIAR membership brings the representatives of our partners and beneficiaries right to this table. That is crucial.

The spirit of partnership that takes concrete form in Southern membership has spilled over into other areas, as demonstrated by vibrant partnership committees, especially the NGO and private sector committees, and in the vitality of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR).

The CGIAR served as catalyst to help set up the GFAR that combines all components of the international agricultural research system - from the perceptive farmer in her field through the deeply caring members of civil society institutions to the creative scientists in their laboratories.

These are all key elements of the legacy of renewal. But renewal does not end with one convulsive spurt. There are always challenges ahead. I said at ICW95 that, in Churchill's pithy phrase, we were only at "the end of the beginning." More - much more - would need to be attempted and achieved.

The time has come for action, once again. It is a time not simply for renewal but, truly, for rebirth.

Sweeping Forces of Change:

We are at the start of a new century, when we are confronted with momentous change. The forces of globalization are sweeping across the planet. Never before have the national boundaries of sovereign states been as permeable to the power of ideas and the transactions of commerce. The international communications technology (ICT) revolution that sends billions of dollars across the world with the click of a mouse and the flight of an electron is but a symptom of the deeper changes being wrought in our perceptions of ourselves and of others. While these forces have undoubtedly created enormous wealth and well-being for many, they have tended to exacerbate the inequities between and within countries.

In the realm of the knowledge-based society, which is inexorably pressing on our future, we are challenged to deal with such vexing issues as the emergence of proprietary science; to summon the will and the innovative skills to design new regimes that are fair to all, and that can forestall that most vicious of all forms of discrimination, scientific apartheid.

Remember, however, that there is another side to globalization as well. Globalization has created a rising awareness of the inter-connectedness of the human family, and is at the heart of the increasing assertion of the universality of human rights, including women's rights and children's rights. It has led to a multiplication of caring and concerned international NGOs that represent an important dimension of the emerging international civil society. It is found in the environmental movement, which reminds all humans that they are stewards of this earth, and that together we must work with nature, not against it.

Of course, the farmers knew that all along, and we must combine their wisdom with our discoveries in the realms of science. Let us re-dedicate ourselves, in that spirit, to being what I have previously called the "new abolitionists." We must be as dedicated to abolishing hunger and poverty, as an earlier Coalition of the Caring was dedicated to abolishing slavery.

In all we undertake, we will find that the set of forces which have the greatest impact upon our work are the profound revolutions of ICT and DNA.

ICT

The key to ICT is not just the wireless technology, but also and more profoundly the digital revolution. By finding the common binary language of ones and zeros, we suddenly see things that appeared impossible become possible and the possible become commonplace. Boundaries are erased. Telephony not only becomes mobile, but is linked to the internet. Television, computers and telecom become one. Image, music, data, and voice are all binary bits that can be manipulated and moved on a common digital mode.

This extraordinary transformative technology forced enormous changes in the businesses that functioned within each of its component parts. Mega-mergers, acquisitions and the emergence of the new have become commonplace. The landscape is being transformed. The fast eat the slow. New names appear with mesmerizing frequency.

Governments are running after the new realities, trying to make regulations meaningful in this world of dizzying change. For those in that business it is truly "change or die"!

Yet despite the astronomic numbers and wealth of the new technology companies, this technological revolution is also a democratizing one. It can empower the weak and the poor if only we have the imagination to see how the benefits can be harnessed properly.

From M. S. Swaminathan's info-villages that have captured universal attention to the inherent open access of the internet, the forces of the civil society and of diversity find in the new technologies powerful tools to “remain local while going global.” The dialectics of connectedness and fragmentation can be combined to the benefit of the poor and the environment with imagination and perseverance.

DNA

In the biological sciences, finding the common ATCG language of DNA is also causing transformative changes in approaches to the practice of science and what is “doable.”

We are living in a time unmatched for the opportunities that it provides the biological sciences. It is an exhilarating time, similar to what physics experienced in the glorious 40 years between 1905 and 1945, when all the concepts were changed, from cosmology to quantum physics, from relativity to the structure of the atoms. Today we are decoding the DNA blueprints of life, we are learning to manage the deployment and expression of genes, we are mobilizing bacteria to do our work, and we are manipulating the very building blocks of life. Like physics in the first half of this century, we are confronted by profound ethical and safety issues. Unlike prior work in biological sciences, our future research will be complicated by the new issues of proprietary science.

The Challenge to the CGIAR:

So, we live in the world of these transformative technologies and vast global currents. We must seize the momentous opportunities offer us, but also remain true to our mission. We must have the courage to seize the future and bend it to our will. We must fashion out of our dreams for better tomorrows the realities of a better world for our children and our children's' children.

We must be guided by the inspiring words of Margaret Mead:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

This requires change, not just in what we do but in how we do it. Our science itself is undergoing changes. The new approaches -- the contextualization of research, agroecology, natural resource management, genomics, and more -- raise as many exciting new questions as they answer old ones. To many in the science world, these are times when, as Daniel Boorstin once observed, the modern discoverer is rather a quester, whose achievements are measured not in the finality of answers, but in the fertility of questions.

Let us enjoy the quest together. Recognizing, as we must today, that from the farmer in her field to the scientist in her lab, we are all problem-inventing as much as problem-solving animals, our vision or the future must therefore be one of flexibility and nimbleness - our vision must be as open-ended as knowledge,

as random as play, as surprising as human imagination and ingenuity, as dedicated to the empowerment of the weak as our sense of shared humanity

But as we do all this we must protect the heartland of the CGIAR, which we have just redefined yet again at this millennial meeting. It is not that the heartland changes so much over time. Rather, it is that the manner in which we are going to do the science in that heartland which changes and has to change yet again. Our commitment is the same, but the manner in which we view how to approach the problem changes.

In the words of TS Eliot:

*"We shall not cease from exploring,
And the end of all our exploring,
Will be to arrive where we started,
And know the place for the first time."*

I have confidence in our scientists. They are always open to the new. Like all scientists they are dedicated to truth, honor, and a constructive subversiveness.... for science advances only by overthrowing the old. They will establish measures of effectiveness and impact: what works, what does not. They will arbitrate among competing claims, alternative visions and paradigms by the standards of science: scientific evidence, rigorous analysis, and rational debate.

And in articulating choices, I know they will be guided by the wise criteria of M. S. Swaminathan: seek out what is pro-poor, pro-women, and pro-environment. Let me only add that each of us must at all times look into our hearts and obey Gandhi's exhortation.

"Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest human whom you have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to that person? Will anything be gained by it? Will it restore control over life and destiny?"

Organizational Change:

But how about organizational change? Is it needed? If it is not, we should not change for change's sake. But if it is needed, as I do believe it is, then we must have the courage to embrace change.

Change is never easy, especially to the successful.

Peter Drucker referring to the IBM of the 70s and to General Motors said that "he whom the gods would smite, they give decades of success" For that very success breeds complacency and a sense of it has worked well in the past, so why change it. But the success itself was based on change.

Change is never easy... But it is necessary, not just for the internal workings of the CGIAR, but for the CGIAR and GFAR and our partners to play a vital role in shaping the new emerging world order for agricultural research; a vital role for public good, for the poor, for the rights of future generations.

That, my friends, is the true revolution, creating a new order of things. There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain of success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order, because the innovator has for enemies, all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new.

But it is our destiny to have been here at this time, and we must try. For it is better to try and fail than to have failed to try.

Envoi:

"Change," Samuel Johnson remarked, "is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better." The scientific temperament does not avoid the perceived inconvenience of change, but takes charge of and directs transformation.

The CGIAR has proved itself to be an outstanding instrument of progress. Its combination of high-level science with grassroots-level impact has been unique and exemplary. Science revels in replenishment. New knowledge replenishes what is losing its potency. New forms and functions replenish the old. The greatest rewards await those who have the courage to undertake the most difficult transformations. So, as you prepare to face the future, I entreat you:

- Reach out boldly and wisely to protect and enhance the inheritance of visionary zeal and boundless compassion that has been passed down from the founders of the CGIAR.
- Ask yourself whether your actions will benefit the men and women of today, and sustain the children who will be the men and women of tomorrow.
- Send an unequivocal signal to center scientists that you have confidence in them, that you support them, and that you will not in any way compromise their competence or erode their dedication.
- Extend your hand to all the partners with whom the CGIAR must work if it is to be truly effective.

Colleagues and friends.

My end is in my beginning. So I say to you now as I did in New Delhi

*"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyages of their lives
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,*

*And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures. "*

As I leave you, I know that you will, with commitment and dedication, with wisdom and ingenuity, take the current. I know that your voyage will speed you onwards to new realms of accomplishment. I know that it is your destiny to help ease the pain and burden of those who need the benefits of science most.

I leave you with the confidence that your commitment to excellence, your passion for effectiveness, and your compassion for the lowliest and helpless in the human family, will ceaselessly thrive.

Good luck, my friends. Good luck and farewell.

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